

POLITICAL CONTENT OF EDUCATION

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I am very grateful to the Academy of Political and Social Studies, and particularly to its Chairman, Shri R. K. Khadilkar, for inviting me to deliver the key-note address to this opportune Seminar on the important but neglected subject of the political content of education. This is an honour which I hardly deserve but of which I shall ever feel proud. I have, therefore, accepted the invitation in all humility, not because I felt that I could make any worthwhile contribution to the subject, but because I was sure to gain a good deal through its deliberations. I am also happy to find that my task as an opening speaker is comparatively easy. I have only to raise a few relevant questions about the theme of the Seminar and then lean back to absorb the solutions as they gradually emerge in the course of the stimulating debate we are all anticipating.

II

EDUCATION AND SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION

The major theme of this Seminar is to determine the political content of the curricula at the different stages of the education system with a view to providing appropriate political education to the people on an adequate scale. But this problem can be discussed only against the background of related wider issues such as the role of education in bringing about the needed social transformation in the country, the kind of political education we

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should have to achieve our social and economic objectives, the role of the education system in providing this education, the nature and extent of the political education which our educational system has provided in the past or is providing at present, the factors which hinder the development of appropriate political education on an adequate scale, and the measures that have to be taken to improve the present admittedly unsatisfactory situation. It is these broad issues that I propose to discuss briefly.

The political system always dominates the entire social scene; and hence those who wield political power are generally able to control all the different social sub-systems, including the educational system, and manipulate them to their own advantage. The social groups in power, therefore, have always manipulated the education systems, especially when these happen to depend upon the State for their very existence, to strengthen and perpetuate their own privileged position. But herein lies a contradiction. For the very realization of their selfish ends, the social groups in power are compelled to extend the benefits of the educational system to the underprivileged groups. This inevitable task is generally performed with three precautions abundantly taken care of: (1) the privileged groups continue to be the principal beneficiaries of the educational system, dominate the higher stages of education or the hard core of prestigious and quality institutions or the most useful of courses so as to safeguard their dominant position of leadership in all walks of life; (2) the system is so operated that underprivileged groups can utilize it only marginally in real terms and the bulk of them become either drop-outs or push-outs and get reconciled to their own inferior status in society; and (3) the few from the weaker sections that survive and succeed in spite of all the handicaps are generally coopted within the system to

prevent dissatisfaction. But education is essentially a liberating force so that as time passes, that at least some underprivileged groups manage to become aware of the reality, sooner or later, the number of the educated soon become too large to be fully coopted; and many able and liberated individuals among them strive to spread the message of disillusionment and to organize the weak and the underprivileged. The resultant awareness of the people combined with suitable organization, necessarily leads to adjustments in the social power structure, to an increase in vertical mobility and new groups begin to share power. Eventually, other social changes also follow and the traditional, inequalitarian and hierarchical social structure tends to be replaced by another which is modern, less hierarchical and more egalitarian. The educational system, therefore, is never politically neutral and it always performs three functions generally simultaneously, *viz.*, it helps the privileged to *dominate*, *domesticates* the underprivileged to their own status in society, and also tends to *liberate*. Which of these effects shall dominate and to what extent, depends mostly on one crucial factor, *viz.*, the quality and quantity of the political education it provides.

The developments in Indian society, polity and education during the last 175 years should be viewed against this broad philosophy. From very ancient times, the Indian society has always been elitist: Power, wealth and education were mostly confined to the three *Dvija* castes of Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Vaishyas. The vast bulk of the people were the poor, weak and mostly illiterate Shudras while the lot of the Antyajas or the tribes who lived on the social fringe was ever worse. What is important to note is that the system had an infinite capacity to adjust or to absorb and, for that very reason, it was extremely resistant to any radical transformation. In spite of all the vicissitudes of 2500 years of history, therefore, the social system continued

to exist almost unchanged till the opening of the nineteenth century when the modern system of education began to be developed by the State.

Under the British rule, the main objective was to educate a class of persons who would act as the interpreters between the rulers and the ruled. Consequently, it was mostly utilized by the social groups in power (who were now modernized) to strengthen and perpetuate their own position. It hardly reached the masses: even in 1947 only one child out of three in the age-group 6-11 and only one out of every eleven in the age-group 11-14 went to school and the percentage of literacy was only about 13. But to the extent it did reach the masses, it mainly domesticated them to accept the existing social order. It no doubt had a liberating role as well, especially when it tried to spread western concepts of individualism, democracy, and liberalism or when it tried to spread education among the poor people, scheduled castes and tribes or girls or when it helped vertical mobility to increase. But these liberalizing forces were the least developed and indirect. Essentially, it was a system that helped domination and domestication rather than liberation.

What was the political education which this system provided? It tried mainly to preach the superiority of England over India in almost every field and to inculcate a loyalty to the Crown. When, in spite of it, some sentiments of nationalism began to grow among the students and teachers, it resented them as indiscipline and tried to suppress them. In the social field, the main policy of governments was that of neutrality. On the whole, therefore, the education system helped the preservation of the *status quo* rather than rapid egalitarian change, mainly because of its weak content of political education. This is the main reason why Mahatma Gandhi advised students to leave

schools and colleges if they wanted to serve the country and establish independent institutions outside the formal educational system to give national education and to train freedom-fighters.

How then did the people get political education in the British period—an education which in the long run helped us to win our freedom? This happened, as I have pointed out, only marginally in the formal system of education. But it was actually developed in a very big way, in a non-formal manner, outside the school system, in the freedom struggle which Gandhiji organized. Here the people participated in millions and got political education through personal involvement—this was a case of ‘learning by doing’. Gandhiji was, therefore, the best ‘adult educator’ the country had and India after Gandhi was vastly different than that before Gandhi. It was the ‘political literacy’ he spread among even the illiterate people that enabled us to win freedom.

What has happened in the post-independence period? Under the British rule, the Congress leaders argued that political education was an important part of education and refused to accept the official view that education and politics should not be mixed with one another. But when they came to power in 1947, they almost adopted the British policy and began to talk of education being defiled by politics. ‘Hands off education’ was the call to political parties. But in spite of it, political infiltration within the educational system has greatly increased in the sense that different political parties vie with each other to capture the minds of teachers and students. As has been wittily observed, the politicians not only fished in the troubled waters of education, but actually troubled the educational scene in order that they may be able to fish. The wise academicians wanted political support without political interference. What we have actually

received is infinite political interference with little or no genuine political support. It is also obvious that this politicking by all parties for their own ulterior motives is no political education at all; and it is hardly a matter for surprise that real political education within the system has been made even weaker than in the pre-independence period.

At the same time, the movement for the Freedom Struggle came to an end and the major non-formal agency of political education disappeared. The Press could and did provide some political education. But it also committed several errors and did not utilize the opportunity to the full, especially as the Indian language papers did not grow adequately and the stranglehold of vested interests continued to dominate. Now even the capacity of the Press to provide appropriate political education has been reduced considerably. All things considered, it appears that we have made no progress in genuine political education in the post-independence period. In fact, we have actually slid back. The education system has become even more elite-oriented. The masses get precious little out of it—about sixty per cent of the people are still illiterate. Patriotism has become the first casualty. Gandhiji made us independent of government, gave us the courage to oppose it, when it was wrong, in a disciplined fashion and on basic principles (he believed the means to be as important as the end) and taught us to work among the poor people for mobilizing and organizing them. Today, we have become more dependent on government than ever, have lost genuine touch with the people in our over-emphasis on electioneering. Mass mobilization has disappeared and we have even lost the courage to fight on basic issues in a disciplinary manner because agitational and anarchic politics for individual, group or party aggrandisement has become common. The education system of today, therefore, continues to support,

as in the pre-independence days, domination by the privileged and domestication or coopting of the underprivileged but not the genuine liberating forces. This situation will not change unless we take vigorous steps to provide genuine political education on an adequate scale. This is one of the major educational reforms we need; and if it is not carried out, all linear expansion of the existing system of formal education will only support the *status quo* and hamper radical social transformation.

III

POLITICAL EDUCATION

This leads me to the second problem, *viz.*, what is the objective, content and method of genuine political education? I shall deal with these problems *seriatim*.

Objectives :

- All education is essentially a three-fold process of
 - imparting essential *information* :
 - building up needed *skills* to react to or to solve problems that arise in day-to-day situations in real life by using the knowledge acquired ; and
 - cultivating the basic *interests, attitudes, and values*.

This applies to political education as well. The objectives of political education can, therefore, be stated as the *training of individuals to be intelligent, effective and responsible citizens through imparting of knowledge, building up of skills and cultivation of values*. All these three elements are significant and have to be developed together, each conditioning the other. Mere knowledge does not serve the objectives of

political education which requires effective participation based on appropriate skills. Similarly, unreflective or ill-informed participation is equally undesirable ; and neither knowledge or participation will lead to the desired social changes unless they are both governed by a proper value system.

Content :

This statement of the objectives of political education naturally leads to the next question : What are the kinds of knowledge, skills or values which political education needs ?

(a) *Knowledge* : Political education needs a knowledge of the following :

- the existing society ; its historical growth ; its value system ; social, economic, cultural, educational and political structures ; division of power and main strength and weaknesses ;
- the new society that the nation desires to create ; its value system ; the process and stages of this social transformation and the type of socio-political forces that will support it ; the role of individuals and social groups or institutions in creating the new society ;
- the existing government of the country (machinery, process, forces) ; its strengths and weaknesses ; alternative forms of government with their strengths and weaknesses ; the value systems underlying different forms of government ;
- the basic problems facing the country in different walks of life ;
- the developmental plans of the country ; alternative methods of development and their strengths and weaknesses.

Since knowledge of facts mentioned above is continually changing (as the facts themselves are), a programme of political education cannot rest content with the imparting of such knowledge as a once-for-all affair. On the other hand, it must build up such self-study skills as will enable each individual to get all the needed information on his own and to keep himself up-to-date through his own personal efforts. This of course necessarily implies that the society does function on a 'open' basis wherein every individual has access to all the relevant facts.

(b) *Skills* : The essence of political education is participation on action. A citizen must be not only politically intelligent, but also politically effective, *i.e.*, he must be able to assist the political system to function properly, to correct aberrations therein as well as to devise strategies for influencing and achieving change in the desired direction. This will need the development of several skills among which the following may be mentioned :

- skills of understanding and evaluation, *e.g.*, understanding of the current political situation in different fields or at different levels, ability to understand the consequences of one's action and view-points as well as of the actions and view-points of others ; development of notions of policy and the ability to evaluate policy objectives, instruments and implementation ; ability to develop and use political concepts ;
- skills of problem solving *i.e.*, evaluating a given political situation and deciding upon the measures needed to deal with at the individual, group or community level ;
- skills of working in groups, of appreciating and respecting views of others, of limiting one's disapproval to argument rather than take it to abuse or blows ;

—ability to understand conflicts of all kinds that arise, (e.g., conflicts between different groups, different programmes, different values etc.) and to develop proper reactions to them ; and

—ability to express himself adequately on political matters so as to ensure effective communication which is so essential to participation.

(c) *Values* : Every social and political system is based upon its own unique frame of values. Some of these are fundamental and absolute, for instance, dignity and autonomy of the individual, equality or social justice. The open democratic system, emphasize the values of freedom, tolerance, fairness, respect for truth, and emphasise on reasoning and ballot rather than on blows or bullets. The significance of self-awareness, self-criticism and especially all things dogmatic or fanatical, is obvious.

One important point has to be noted. The acquisition of knowledge, skills and values is not necessarily at the same level for all persons. The level of attainment in this regard would vary from stage to stage of education (e.g., a student should rise to successively higher levels at primary, secondary and university stages and even at the same stage, it may vary from one group of students to another e.g., a student of political science at the university stage would be at a different level from, say, a student of animal psychology or chemistry at the same stage). This presents a challenge to the educator, the sociologist, the psychologist and the political scientist to sit together and frame appropriate curricula for each stage of education, suited to the age and maturity of students at that stage.

Methods :

Political education has to be provided as an integral part of the formal system of education at all stages. But here we have several problems :

—At present, political education is equated with civics or education in citizenship at the school stage. This is a colourless and ineffective combination of a study of the Constitution and Five Year Plans and does not even provide the needed information content. The building up of skills and especially the cultivation of values is totally neglected. The methods of teaching are often based on rote memorization and the element of 'doing' introduced is sometimes grotesque (e.g., election of ministers and cabinet in primary school parliaments). The quality of the political education provided is, therefore, very poor.

—Even quantitatively, the problem is no better. At the elementary stage, the extent of political education that can be imparted is necessarily limited because of the young age of the students. But even here, we have not been able to provide universal education. It is at the secondary and university stages that we have a greater chance of succeeding. But here, the total enrolment is only about 10 percent of the age-group 15-25 and of these, only a few study the subject which is not compulsory for all.

—There is little interest and sustained work on the problem. We have no high level

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teams working on the problem anywhere. No good teaching materials are available. The teachers have had no orientation. There is hardly any research and we do not even know how the system is actually faring in practice.

Even in the formal system of education, we have huge tasks to be attempted. But it must be remembered that political education can make the best headway through non-formal channels. Political education is needed most by the poor and the underprivileged—they are not reached by formal education system. Political education can be most effective among the youth in the age-group 15-25 and among adults : but these can be reached mostly through non-formal education. These programmes do not just exist at present. The best method of providing political education (*e.g.*, learning by doing) is the involvement of the masses in programmes of *development and organizing them*. But this task has been almost totally ignored by all. The left parties have a special responsibility for this. But they do precious little.

The outcome

So far, I have discussed only the inputs into the education system, formal or non-formal, to provide political education. But this is hardly enough. I will, therefore, say a few words about the outcomes of political education or the concrete results which we should expect from it.

The first outcome of political education is to provide a basic minimum to all individuals with the objective of making them into intelligent, effective and responsible citizens. This may be called *political literacy*. By definition, it should include all such knowledge, skills and attitudes which every individual must have. A politically literate person

must know what the main issues in contemporary politics are as he himself is affected and must know how to set about informing himself further about them. He will then know which the main political disputes are about, what beliefs the main contestants have of them, how they affect him and what he can or should do about them. But political literacy is not just knowledge or a theoretical analysis. Even more importantly, it is action based on right skills and values. That is why political literacy is even more difficult to attain than ordinary literacy. As can be easily imagined, the extent of political illiteracy amongst us is horrifyingly large.

The knowledge, skills and attitudes which the leadership at various levels need is certainly much higher than political literacy. The complexity of problems to be tackled at various levels (*e.g.*, local community, district, state or centre) or in different walks of life such as agriculture, industry or the services shows immense variety and consequently, the leadership at all these levels and fields will need different levels of competence in political education. Our programmes of political education must make the provision for this.

So far, I have spoken of the different inputs in political education. It is also possible and necessary, however, to look at political education from the point of its output or results. For instance, it may be stated that programmes of political education should produce persons who will be able to function at the following three levels of political action :

- (a) the purely and properly conserving level (*e.g.*, knowing how our present system of Government works and knowing the beliefs that are regarded as parts of it) ;

- (b) the liberal or participatory level of the development of knowledge, skills and values necessary for active citizenship ; and
- (c) the highest level at the risk of personal sacrifice (and including even the sacrifice of one's life) for striving to change the direction of Government or to promote basically alternative systems (this is almost equivalent to the concept of Satyagraha which Mahatma Gandhi put forward).

These three levels or stages through which a programme of political education is to be developed should be promoted in secondary and university stages of education.

Agencies

What are the agencies that will provide political education ? Within Education itself, the formal school system is a minor agency of political education and I have stressed earlier that the non-formal system which covers the out-of-school youth in the age-group 15-25 and adults is a far more powerful and effective agency. It should not be forgotten, however, that the educational system, formal or non-formal, is still only one of the agencies of political education and perhaps a minor one. There are several social agencies which have to play their role in the programmes just as they have to play a corresponding role in programmes of other education as well. Political education must be promoted by the Press, by instruments of Government at different levels such as the local bodies, the State Government and the Central Government and political parties (and especially the left-oriented parties).

Political education has its own theoretical part which can be taught in a class-room or through other channels of formal instruction. But as it is essentially an action

programme, it will have to be learnt through the method of 'learning by doing'. Organisations like Students' Unions, teachers' organisations, have to be promoted and work properly within the educational system for the purpose of providing *political education of the right type* through participatory action. But perhaps the most important method of good political education would be to develop a nationwide programme of mass mobilization and involvement in developmental programmes. This, as I said earlier, would be the counterpart of the struggle of political freedom which was waged in the pre-independence days.

IV

A PROGRAMME OF ACTION

Finally, I will refer briefly to the second theme of this Seminar, *viz.*, preparing an outline of programme of action which the Academy of Political and Social Studies, Pune, can develop over a period of 3 to 5 years, in collaboration with other agencies interested in the field. In my opinion, this programme should consist of research, publications, experimentation, training of teachers and student-leaders and organizing campaigns to educate public opinion. The ultimate objective of the programmes should be three : (1) to influence the policies of Government and the official system of education so that a programme of appropriate political education is included within it on an adequate scale ; (2) to develop valuable insights and understanding of the programme and its different aspects ; (3) a large number of inter-disciplinary personnel is trained for dealing with problems of political education. I have already taken too long over this Address. I shall, therefore, not dilate on

this subject in detail. I do hope that the Seminar will find adequate time to deal with this important issue.

I congratulate the Academy of Political and Social Studies, Pune, for having initiated this programme of studies relating to the relationship between education, society and politics. It is only the basic studies into its relationship that will enable us to develop programmes of social transformation and political action.

I hope that the Academy will make every effort to elicit co-operation and collaboration of other agencies, for the development of this crucial programme and I hope that its efforts will be, crowned with success.

EDUCATION AS CONSPIRACY

A. D. BHOGLE*

A preliminary observation : Should education have a political or ideological content is, as yet, a matter of *polemic* in India and not one of planning, modalities and implementation. Hence use of a word such as "conspiracy" or a reference to the knight-hood bestowed upon some prominent personalities by His Majesty The King Emperor.

And another : Political bias of education in India shows up not only directly as in the selections of passages for anthologies in English or language studies but in subtle ways as in their concept of "merit", "standard", "objectivity", "individual liberty" etc. which guide their thought and action. Attacking these concepts may sometimes appear to nice people as shadow-boxing or as storming the wind mills. My fear is that it isn't.

Education is a privilege in India. And there is a conspiracy to the traditionally privileged sections of the Indian society. Conspiracy is a political act, the repost to a conspiracy, consequently, is also a political act. These political acts constitute for me the sum and substance of the expression : the political content of education.

This brief note shall seek to point out the existence of such a conspiracy and to indicate the nature of the repost if the conspiracy has to be defeated and smashed.

But first do let us dispose of the doubt. Is there indeed a conspiracy ? To do so, let us list a few major failures in the field of education and then a few noticeable successes. If education were not a conspiracy both failures and

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